

The Missing Womens Task Force and the R.W. Pickton Investigation (Canada's Most Prolific Serial Murderer)

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The RCMP National Forensic Services began working with Project Even Handed (later named the Joint Missing Womens Task Force [MWTF]) in the spring of 2001. The mandate of Project Even Handed was to investigate the disappearances of 27 drug addicted sex trade workers from the Downtown Eastside area of Vancouver, BC. The investigational strategy was based on: a) developing DNA profiles for the Missing Women from the Vancouver Downtown Eastside; b) conducting an in depth file review of > 150 historical homicide and sex assault cases; c) analyzing exhibits from > 230 historical sex assault cases; and d) gathering genetic information and criminal history on several hundred persons of interest.

On February 5th, 2002 a search warrant was executed on 953 Dominion Ave in Port Coquitlam, BC, for the purpose of illegal weapons possession. Members of the MWTF also attended the 17 acre farm and upon initial search of R.W. Pickton's residence found items related to one or more missing women. A new search warrant was obtained widening the scope of the search and the largest crime scene in Canada was established. A Laboratory Search Unit was established on site and investigational staff was increased by 10-fold. Numerous buildings, vehicles, machinery, freezers, and soil were searched in great detail yielding evidence to initially support 15 charges of First Degree Murder and as months went by further evidence was uncovered. Forensic expertise in Firearms, Toxicology, Chemistry, Documents and Biology were employed in this investigation.

The discovery of mixed DNA profiles from some exhibits resulted in a grid format for subsequent examinations and resulted in the collection of >240,000 exhibits (primarily swabs) for DNA analysis. The RCMP National Forensic Laboratory Services was greatly strained during 2002 and 2003 as samples flowed through the national system. Automated Robotic workstations were validated and put into use in April 2004 to increase the capacity of DNA analysis.

A Preliminary Hearing on 15 Counts of murder for R.W. Pickton was held in June 2003 resulting in R.W. Pickton being committed to trial. At the conclusion of the search of R.W. Pickton's property there was sufficient evidence identified to charge R.W. Pickton with 27 counts of First Degree Murder. Due to a successful Severance Application by R.W. Pickton's Defense team, R.W. Pickton was indicted on 6 Counts of First Degree Murder in January 2007 and the judge and jury trial commenced. In December 2007, the jury found the defendant guilty of second degree murder on all 6 Counts. An appeal has been filed by both Crown and Defense and is due to be heard in March 2009.